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ABSTRACT

The use of the Advising Intake Form with nontraditional students at University of Maryland's University College is discussed. The form is completed by students for each advising appointment. The following types of data on students are collected: demographic information, educational history, current career field, personal and educational objectives, history of advising at University College, and reasons for seeing an advisor. One function of the form is to promote needs assessment of students' course/program interests. Inservice training of advisors is based on the kinds of advice students seek, as revealed by the form. This approach also provides a measure of advisor workload, as well as an indication of the percentage of advising services provided to University College and non-University College students. Further, the form provides marketing information that can be used in planning effective programs and services. The intake form is the only source of information on nonstudents (advisees who have not matriculated at University College). Since one question on the form asks where advisees heard about University College, the answers have implications for advertising campaigns. (SW)

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The fragmentation and shrinkage of the traditional college market are forcing post-secondary institutions to make changes to maintain enrollments. One such change is the growing tendency to include programs for part-time, nontraditional students such as adult learners seeking courses or degree programs for career enhancement.

Institutions pursuing this relatively new market have quickly learned that to court these educational consumers successfully, the curricula, delivery mechanisms, and student services provided need to be more than replicas of those offered for the younger, traditional student. This is particularly true of academic advisement, a key service in assisting the nontraditional learner to identify and clarify educational goals and develop strategies to reach these goals.

University College of The University of Maryland, modified its academic advisement program in 1979 to make it more responsive to the nontraditional student. At that time, University College established a centralized advising system open to University College students and non-University College students

alike. Both groups are invited to "walk-in" for advising at their convenience or to make an appointment with an advisor of their choice. Advising services are available days and evenings at the main campus and by appointment at 25 sites around the state.

While such a service functions effectively in meeting the needs of working adults, it presents a number of challenges to the college. Effective management of information on students is imperative for the program to operate efficiently. This is particularly true for the non-University College student advisee who has no previous records that advisors can draw on to facilitate the advising session.

To enhance information flow, an Advising Intake Form is completed by students for each advising appointment. Data on students are collected in six categories: demographic information, educational history, current career field, personal and educational objectives, history of advising at University College, and reasons for seeing an advisor. In addition, students indicate where they learned about University College programs and specify preferences for locations where courses can be offered. Advisors note the location at which students were advised and record outcomes for the advising sessions.

There are several advantages to using this form. First, it allows a flexible advising program to function smoothly by providing advisors with needed information on students and non-students alike. Second, because the Advising Intake Form is machine readable (optically scanned), data can be compiled

easily. Third, regular reports produced by the Office of Institutional Research provide management, marketing, and planning information to key administrators.

Since 1980, data from over 14,000 intake forms completed by advisees have been collected and stored in computer files. Translating these data into useful information in the areas of planning, management and marketing is discussed below.

PLANNING INFORMATION

Planning for Students

Walk-in advising and advising-by-appointment are heavily subscribed services at University College. In order to be responsive to both students and nonstudents alike, advisors work to maximize what is accomplished in such sessions. The Advising Intake Form is an important tool in helping them to do this.

The Advising Intake Form enhances the advisor's ability to deal personally and efficiently with current students. While there are student records available for this type of advisee, the form further facilitates the session by collecting information on the purpose of this particular student visit. Advisors can then direct their remarks to issues of interest at the time of the visit.

At the end of the advising session the advisor notes on the form the types of services s/he provided for the student. All copies of the Advising Intake Form are retained in student files

and any advisor who counsels the student in the future can see what kinds of services were previously provided. This eliminates the repetition of information about programs and services unless specifically requested by the student.

If the Advising Intake Form is facilitative in advising the current student, it is critical to successfully advising the non-University College student. One would be unable to offer an efficient advising service to such a student without an information-gathering tool of one kind or another. The Advising Intake Form makes meaningful information exchange possible within a brief period without requiring students to complete lengthier documents such as most application or registration forms.

The non-University College student, on completing the Advising Form, provides the advisor with a brief demographic and educational history, with information on educational objectives and career goals, and, as with the current student, reasons for scheduling the advising appointment. Using this information, the advisor can direct his/her remarks to the student's background and interests.

Planning for Advisors

The success of University College's open advising system lies in the flexibility of the advising staff. Unlike more traditional institutions where students are often advised by faculty within their areas of speciality, University College advisors must be able to speak to the requirements and program characteristics of

all areas of concentration. Consequently, advisors are required to stay in touch with new programs, with adjustments in long-standing programs and, because University College students are career-oriented, with the requirements of numerous career fields.

In recent years, advocates of consumerism in education have recommended that colleges and universities conduct parallel needs assessments of their students and of employers. University College promotes this position and requires its advisors to remain current on issues relative to students' career concerns.

In this capacity, the Advising Intake Form serves as a type of needs assessment instrument. It informs advisors and senior staff of students' course/program interests. As students' needs and interests shift and as the kinds of advice they seek change, so does the type of in-service training provided for advisors. For example, after several years of high enrollments in business and management courses, advisors noted a shift in student interest to computer science and information systems management areas of concentration. Students began appearing with more and more technical questions about computer courses, questions which some advisors struggled to address. Now, as analyses of the Advising Intake Form show new interests on the part of current and potential students, new training programs are developed and provided to advising staff to enable them to discuss in depth the implications of completing different University College courses/degrees. Advisors are also able to advise students on the need to obtain

specific areas of knowledge if they wish to compete successfully in certain career fields.

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Workload Management

At the end of each advising session, the advisor records his/her ID number on the intake form and how the session was resolved (i.e., what kinds of services were provided). Tabulating ID numbers provides a gross measure of advisor workload. For example, for the fall 1982 schedule period (July, August, September and October 1982), for individual advisors the percentage of students advised ranged from less than .1% (about 3 students) to 14.6% (about 438 students). Placed in the context of the advisors' other responsibilities, these data help the advisors manage their advising workload and determine whether they are spending an "appropriate" amount of time with students relative to other advisors.

Advisors also vary in the amount of time they spend with students in a session. Depending on their style and the student's needs, sessions may range from 20 minutes to one and one-half hours in length. Since some advisors spend a large part of their time advising off-campus, they may see fewer students than the advisor on campus. Supervisors use these data to help maintain workload equity for the advising staff.

Nonstudent Conversions

Both University College students and non-University College students (nonstudents) can avail themselves of advising services. Consequently, it is important for management to know what proportion of advising resources are being spent on these two populations. Advisees indicate on the intake form whether they have attended University College before. Analyses have shown that almost half of the students coming in to see an advisor indicate that they are not University College students. Of particular interest is whether or not students at some time do matriculate at University College. Of equal interest is the role that advising services play in the conversion of nonstudents into revenue producing, matriculating students. Since advisees indicate their social security number on the intake form, it is a relatively straightforward task to determine a conversion rate.

For example, from January 1981 through November 1982 approximately 14,062 Advising Intake Forms were completed. Removed from the computer file were: (1) records with missing SSN's (N=22); and, (2) duplicate records (where more than one intake form was completed by a student, the record from the earliest form was used). The resulting file that was matched with University College's student data base contained 10,352 cases. Of these, 3,267 or 31.6% reported on their advising forms that they never attended University College before. In other words, these 3,267 students had taken at least one credit with the college but they had indicated at the time of advisement that

they were not a student. So while almost half of advisees are nonstudents, many of these individuals go on to become University College students and Advising Services may have played a role in this decision. Such information can be vitally important when it comes time to justify the expenditure of scarce resources on student advising.

MARKETING

Although the Advising Intake Form was designed primarily to inform the academic advisors about the student, abundant marketing information can be derived from the data and put to use in planning effective programs and services.

Nonstudents

From a marketing point of view, nonstudents (advisees who complete the Advising Intake Form and have not matriculated at University College) merit close attention. Since about half (48%) are nonstudents, the intake form is the only source of information available on this group. A profile of this population, including demographic information, previous educational experience, career field, immediate educational objective, and major academic area of interest can easily be obtained from the computer file. With the profile in hand, administrators can respond more appropriately to nonstudents and provide for specific programmatic directions.

Advertising

A significant activity that falls within the purview of marketing is advertising. Advertising is considered to be those activities that make known to students and nonstudents the availability of programs and services at the college. Communicating with the nontraditional nonstudent can be very expensive depending on the medium chosen. It is, therefore, critically important to determine the most effective means of advertising, especially given the limited resources of most educational institutions.

In order to provide some insight into what media have been effective, a question is included on the intake form which asks where the advisee heard about University College. The results for the fall 1982 schedule period are shown in Table 1. Included here are both University College students and nonstudents. The results reveal that non-personal media (e.g., radio/TV, newspaper, schedule, brochure) account for 32.4% of the responses while personal-oriented sources account for 52.8%. The data suggest strategies for various types of advertising campaigns. Each type of campaign might be vastly different in its approach, but similar in its outcome--increasing the information flow to potential students.

Table 1.

Where did you hear about University College?
(Fall 1982)

SOURCE	PERCENT RESPONSE	RESPONSES
NEWSPAPER	3.6	108
RADIO/TV	1.1	33
FRIEND	26.0	780
AT WORK	8.8	264
ACADEMIC ADVISOR	8.5	255
MILITARY ED. OFFICER	9.5	285
SCHEDULE OF CLASSES	18.8	564
BROCHURE	8.9	267
OTHER	14.9	447
Total	100.0	3,003

A further analysis of these data might focus on nonstudent respondents. It would be extremely important to determine their source of information about the college since advertising tends to focus on "new" clientele--new consumers who are to be considered the life blood of a nontraditional educational institution.

Marketing and Expressed Convenient Class Locations

It is widely recognized that nontraditional students will choose those schools that provide convenient locations for classes. It is therefore appropriate that an item soliciting information on locations convenient to students and nonstudents alike be included in the intake form. The results are provided to those offices principally concerned with scheduling and course site selection. With this information in hand, sound decisions can be made about where to offer classes that are convenient to

students. The results for the spring 1983 schedule period (the months of November, December, January, February and March) are shown in Table 2. Further analyses might examine the preferred location of nonstudents since their decision to attend or not could be based in part on the location(s) that would be convenient.

Table 2.

University College Location(s) most Convenient To You
(Spring 1983)

LOCATION	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT RESPONSES	PERCENT CASES
HARFORD/CECIL CO.	4	.1	.2
BALTIMORE	93	3.4	4.6
WESTERN MARYLAND	26	1.0	1.3
UPPER MONTGOMERY CO.	243	9.0	12.1
COLLEGE PARK	1539	56.9	76.4
HOWARD COUNTY	91	3.4	4.5
ANNE ARUNDEL CO.	200	7.4	9.9
PRINCE GEORGE'S CO.	217	8.0	10.8
SOUTHERN MARYLAND	44	1.6	2.2
UPPER EASTERN SHORE	4	.1	.2
LOWER EASTERN SHORE	1	.0	.0
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	118	4.4	5.9
NORTHERN VIRGINIA	127	4.7	6.3
TOTAL	2707	100.0	134.3

CONCLUSIONS

The Advising Intake Form has proven to be a useful tool to capture data and provide information to both advisors and managers. There are, however, limitations to the use of these data for decision making on the college level. Since advisees represent a self-selected population, it is not known to what extent they are representative of University College students as

a whole. In some cases the presence of nonstudents in the group complicates the picture. Nevertheless, these data provide a solid piece of the planning and management puzzle that colleges serving nontraditional students must contend with in meeting the needs of their student populations.